

# **An Evolving Portrait of Head Start Families**

**Robert W. O'Brien, Ph.D., Mary Ann D'Elio, M.S.,  
Michael J. Keane, Dr.P.H.**

**The CDM Group, Inc.**

# Introduction

There has been a great degree of societal change brought on by events of recent years, such as welfare reform and the diversification of the population served by Head Start. This has been reflected in the changing population that is taking advantage of Federal services for families. With these changes has come increased scrutiny of Federal programs providing services, including those designed for low-income families. If the programs that serve low-income children and their families are to be responsive to the evolving portrait of the people they serve, new data are needed on a regular basis. One goal of the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) is to follow a national sample of Head Start families, to learn about the characteristics of these families, and to understand the challenges they face. The value of this information is in helping Head Start adapt policies and procedures to better fulfill its mission of assisting families in their own development as the primary nurturers of their children.

## The Respondents

- All respondents reported that they were a primary caregiver -- responsible for the daily care of the child
- 87.8% were the mother of the Head Start child
- 5.1% were the father of the Head Start child
- 4.2% were the grandmother of the Head Start child
- 2.9% were other relatives or foster parents

## The Interview

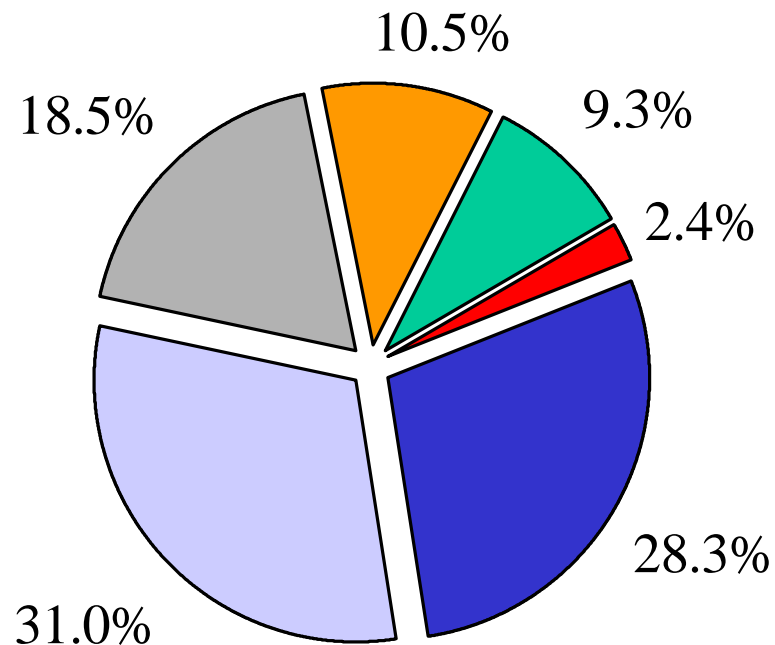
- Face-to-Face, individual interviews were completed with 3,156 families in the fall of 1997; 2,688 follow-up interviews were completed in the spring of 1998. Findings presented here are from the fall 1997 data, unless otherwise noted.
- Most interviews were completed at the local Head Start centers (79.6%) or the child's home (14.4%); 16.9% of the families were interviewed in Spanish, and 0.5% in some other language.
- Most interviews lasted about one hour; respondents received \$15.00 upon completion of the interview.

# The Instrument

The FACES Parent Interview was designed to collect basic, descriptive information about the respondent, the child, and each child's household. In addition to demographics, information was collected on the following topics:

- Satisfaction and Activities With Head Start
- Family Activities With the Child
- Disabilities
- The Primary Caregiver's Assessment of Child Skills and Social Behavior
- Household Rules
- Employment, Income, and Housing
- Use of Community Services
- Child Care
- Family Health Care
- Home Safety Practices
- Home and Neighborhood Characteristics
- Ratings of Social Support
- Feelings of the Primary Caregiver About Herself/Himself

# Most Primary Caregivers Were Between 20 and 30 Years of Age



■ 18-20

■ 20-25

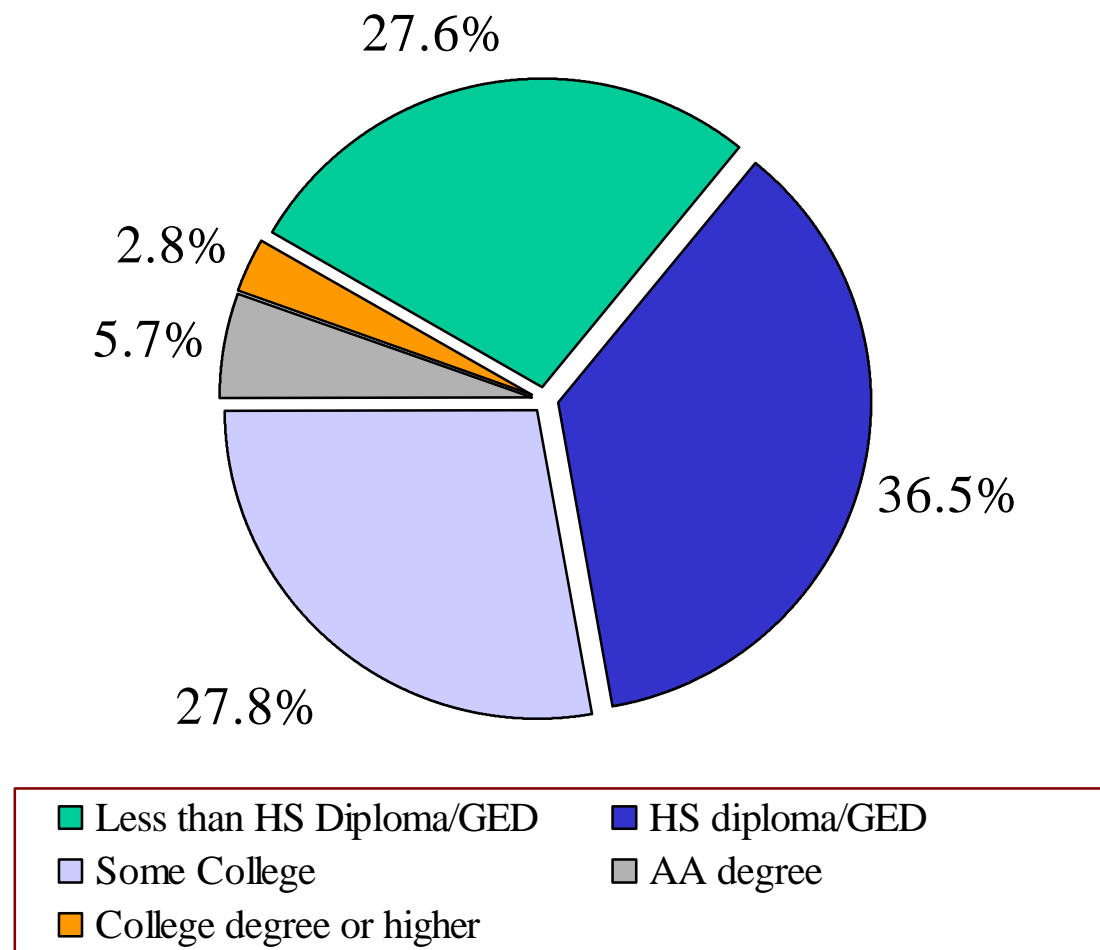
■ 25-30

■ 30-35

■ 35-40

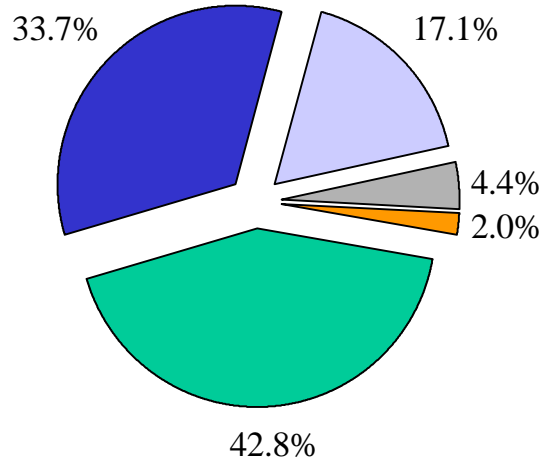
■ Over 40

## Most Primary Caregivers Had at Least a High School Diploma or a GED



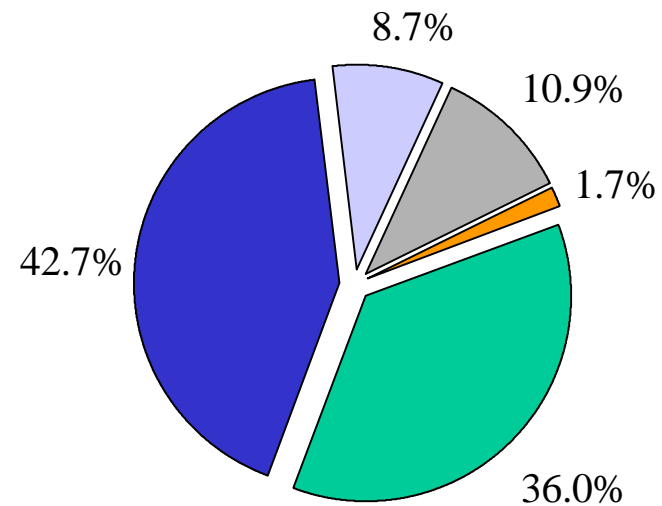
- 8.6% of the Primary Caregivers reported having completed a license, certificate, or degree between fall 1997 and spring 1998

## Mothers were Present in 93% of the Households; Fathers in 44% of the Households



■ Mother & Father	■ Mother only
■ Mother & Other	■ Other
■ Father Only/& Other	

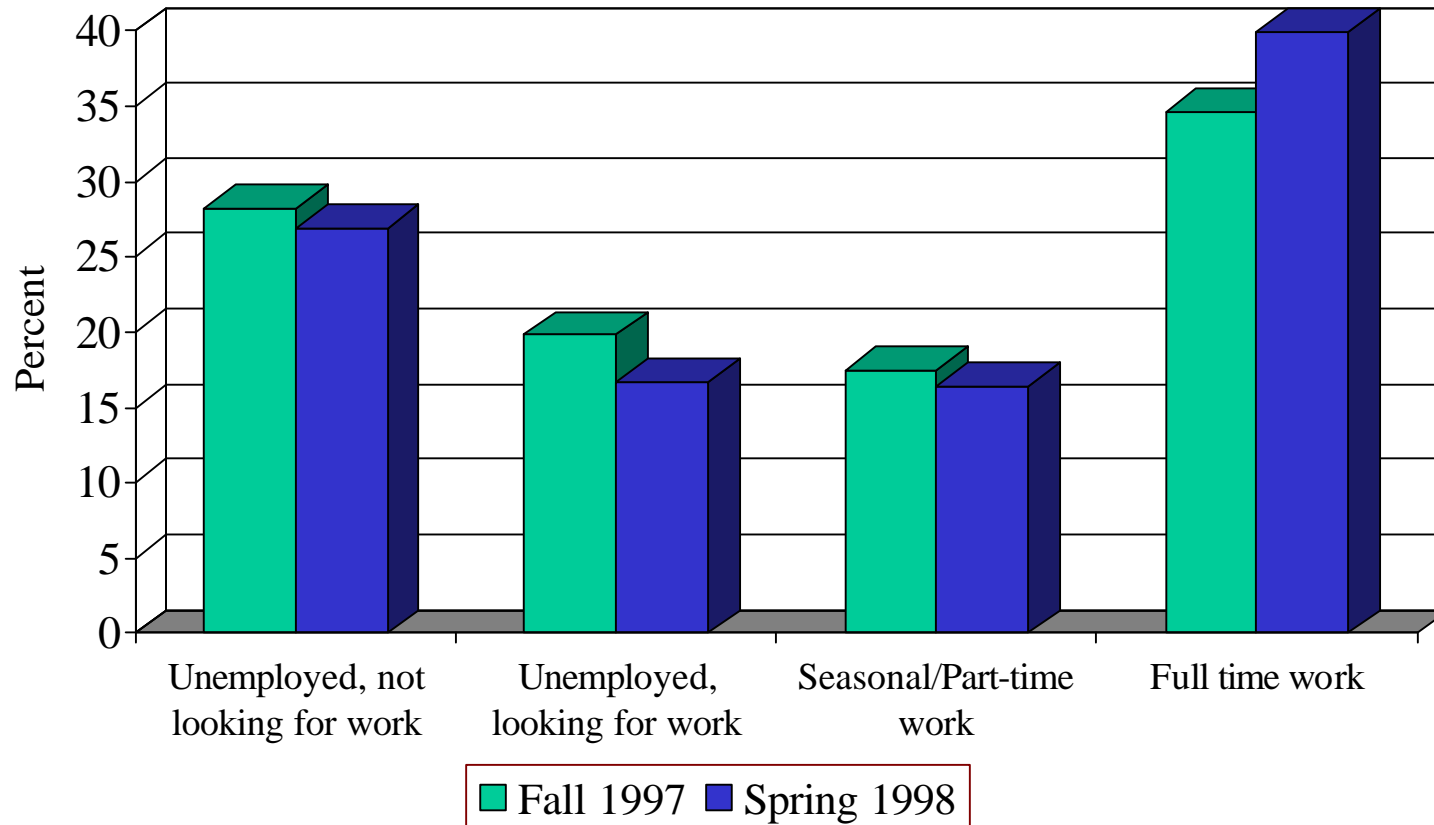
## Primary Caregivers were Equally Likely to be Married as Single



■ Single	■ Married	■ Separated
■ Divorced	■ Widowed	

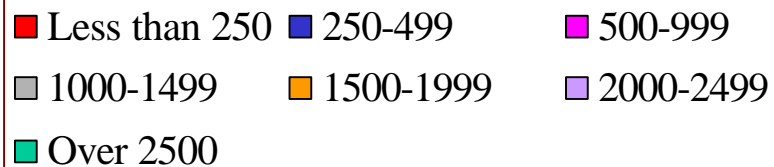
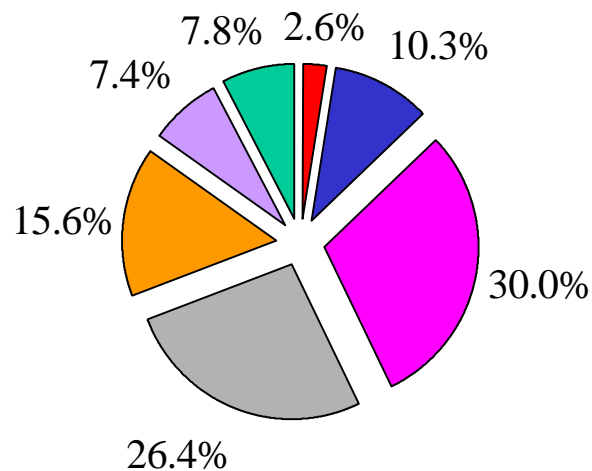
- Households had a mean of 4.47 people (range = 2 to 15)

## More Than 50% of the Primary Caregivers Were Employed

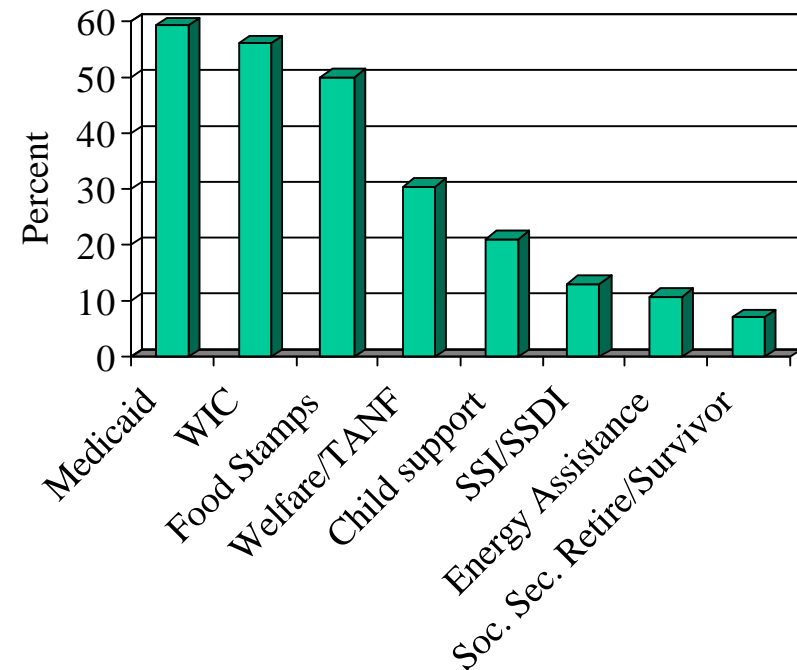


- 52.1% of the Primary Caregivers reported having a job in fall 1997; 56.4% reported employment in spring 1998

## The Prior Month Income was Less Than \$1500 for Over Two-thirds of the Head Start Households

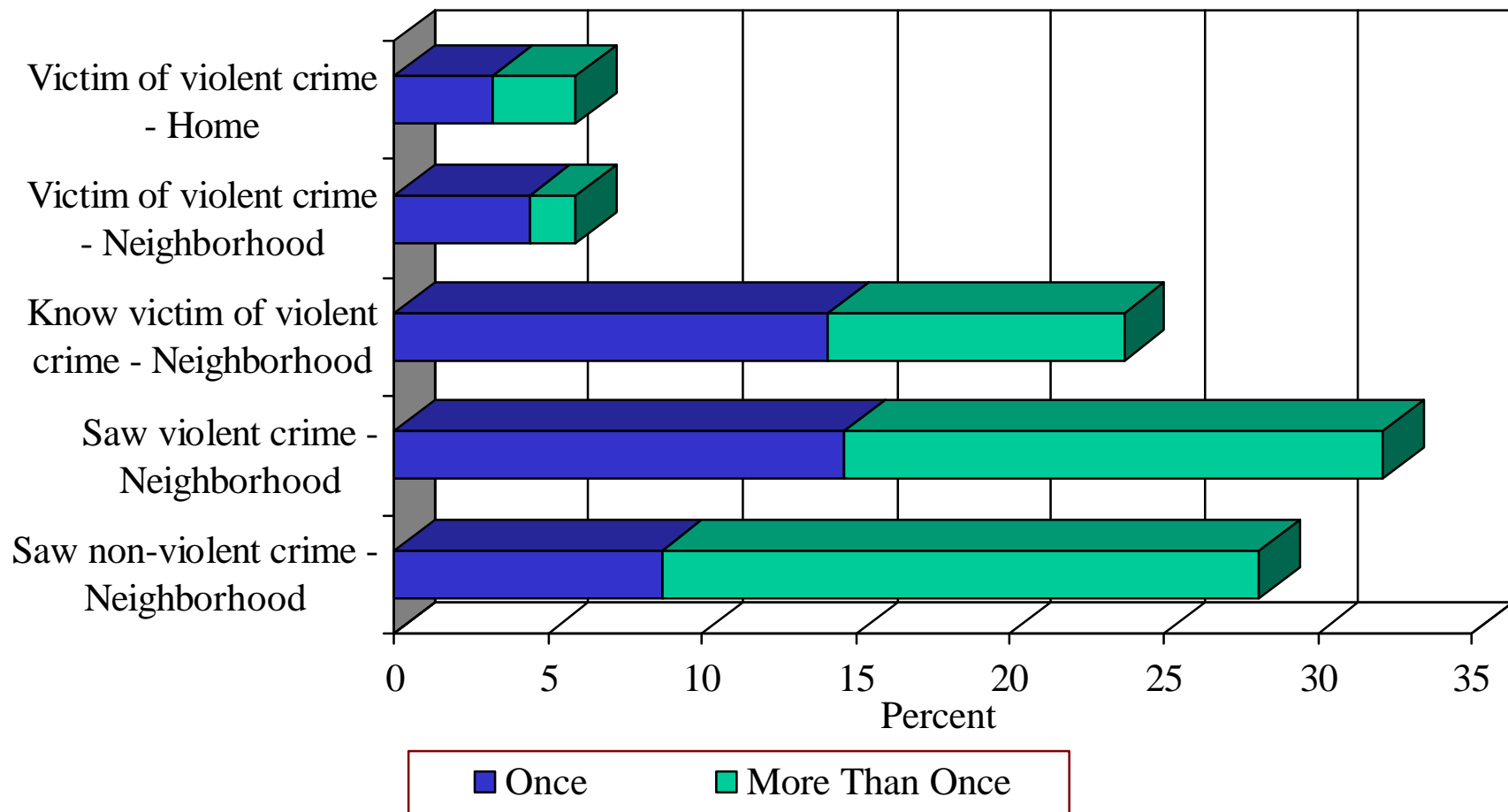


## Supplemental Sources of Income are Received in 85% of the Head Start Households



- 30.6% of the Primary Caregivers reported receiving TANF in fall 1997; 25.5% reported receiving TANF in spring 1998

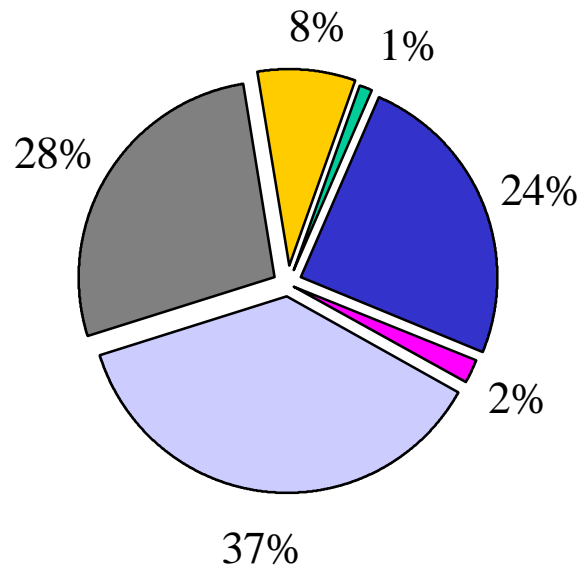
## Over 30% of Primary Caregivers had Some Exposure to Violence During the Past Year



# One-Fifth of Head Start Children Have Been Exposed to Violence

- Children as witnesses to violent crime or domestic violence
  - In fall 1997, 17.4% of the children were reported to have witnessed a violent crime or domestic violence in their life.
  - In spring 1998, 6.8% were reported to have witnessed domestic violence in the past year
  - In spring 1998, 3.7% were reported to have witnessed violent crime in the past year
- Children as victims of violent crime or domestic violence
  - In fall 1997, 2.9% of the children were reported to have been the victims of a violent crime or domestic violence in their life
  - In spring 1998, 0.8% were reported to have been the victims of domestic violence in the past year
  - In spring 1998, 0.6% were reported to have been the victims of violent crime in the past year

# Head Start Serves a Diverse Group of Children



- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Hispanic/Latino
- American Indian/Alaskan Native
- African-American
- White
- Other

- 60.3% of the children were 4-year-olds; 39.7% were 3 year-olds
- 50.6% were male; 49.4% were female
- 98.3% of the children were born in the United States
- 80.6% of the children were in their first year of Head Start

## Disabilities and Health Problems Were Reported for Less Than 20% of Head Start Children

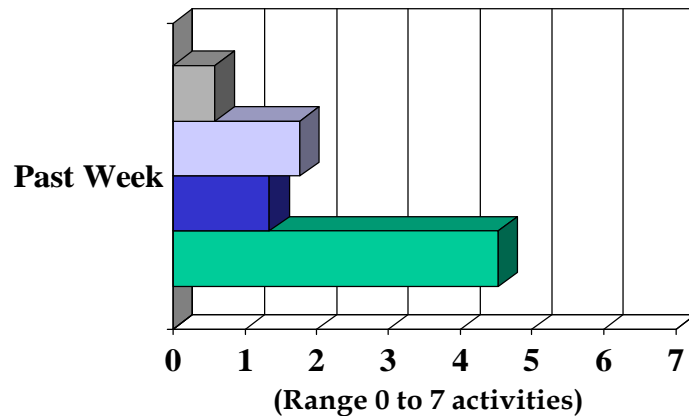
<b>Disability</b>	<b>FACES Primary Caregiver Reports (Spring 1998) N=2688</b>	<b>National Head Start Program Reports N=860,226</b>
Speech or Language Impairments	12.35%	7.70%
Non-Categorical/ Developmental Delay	0.60%	1.98%
Health Impairment	1.19%	0.81%
Emotional/ Behavioral Disorder	2.42%	0.51%
Learning Disabilities	1.15%	0.22%
Orthopedic Impairment	0.37%	0.19%
Mental Retardation	0.26%	0.16%
Hearing Impairment (including Deafness)	1.19%	0.11%
Visual Impairment (including Blindness)	0.60%	0.10%

Note: Disability categories are from the Head Start Program Information Report. Autism and Traumatic Brain Injury were less than 0.1% for both the FACES reports and the national reports.

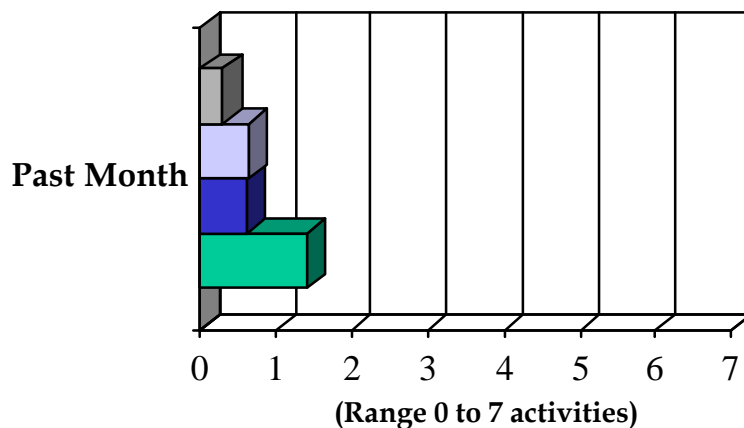
## **More Than a Quarter of the Primary Caregivers Reported That the Child Was in Child Care in Addition to Head Start**

- 49.3% of the children were in child care (defined as 10 or more hours a week) prior to Head Start enrollment
- 28.1% of the children were in child care in addition to attending Head Start
  - 68.7% were in settings where they are cared for by a friend or relative
  - 13.9% were in a child care center
  - 8.5% were in family day care
  - 8.0% received child care at Head Start, separate from the regular classes
- 84.8% of the respondents who reported a need for child care were employed
- These Head Start children were in child care for a mean of 19.2 hours per week

# Most Activities with the Children Were Undertaken by the Mother



Mothers	Fathers
Other Household Members	Non-household Members



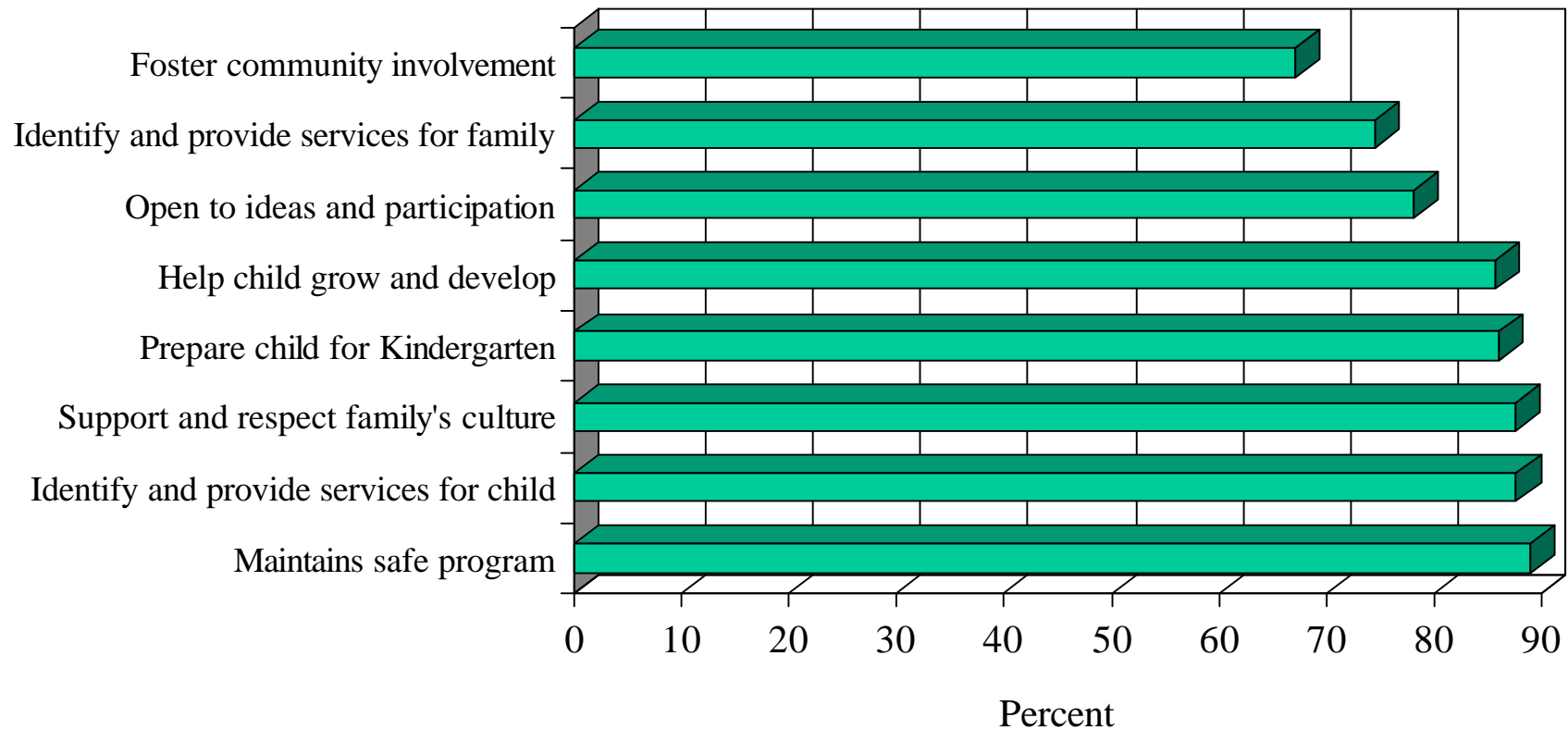
## Past Week Activities:

- Telling a story; Teaching letters, words, or numbers; Teaching songs or music; Arts and crafts; Playing games (indoors or outdoors); Household chores; Doing errands

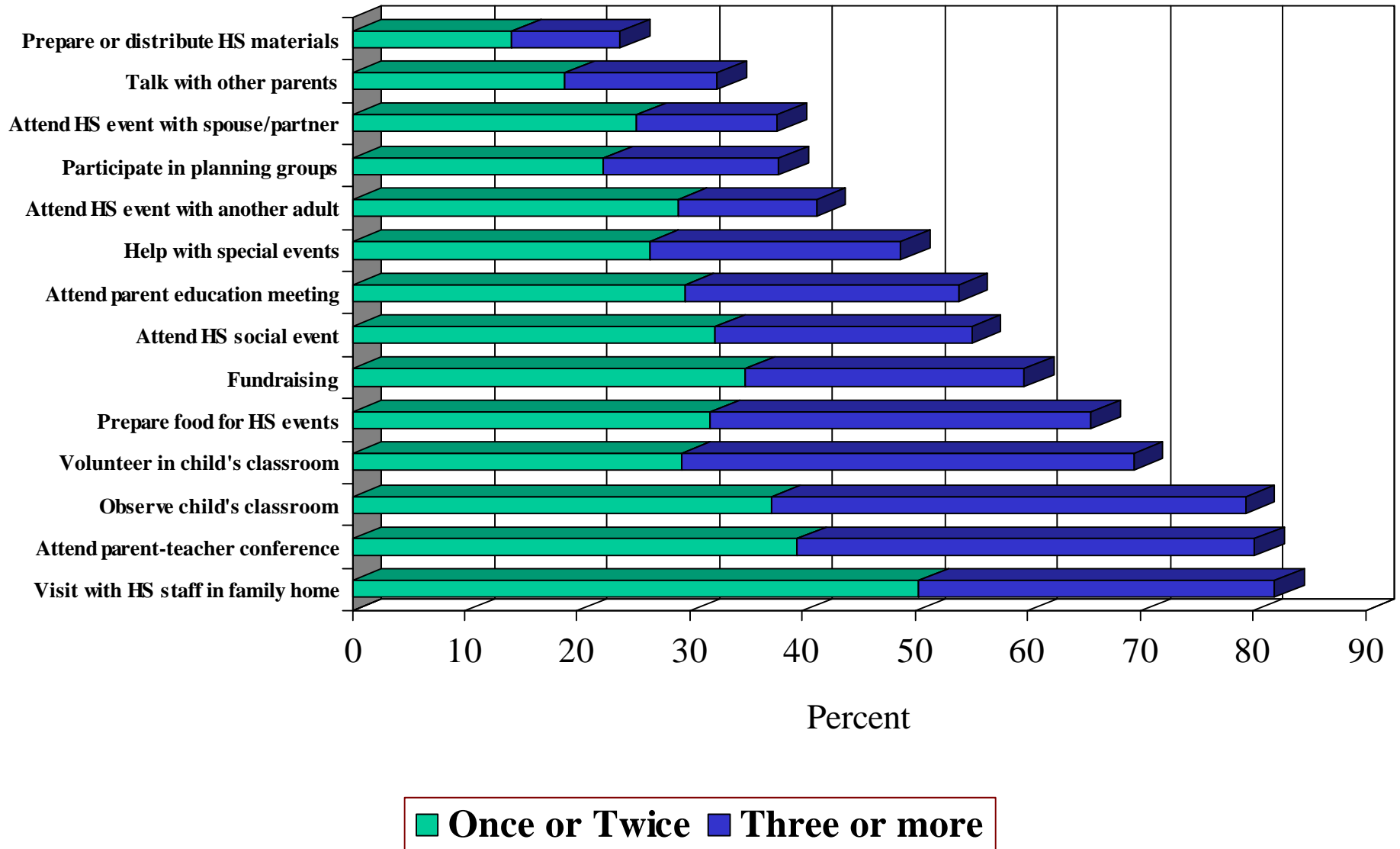
## Past Month Activities

- Visiting a library; Going to a live show; Going to an art gallery or museum; Discussing family heritage; Visiting a zoo or aquarium; Attending a community, ethnic, or religious event; Attending a sporting event

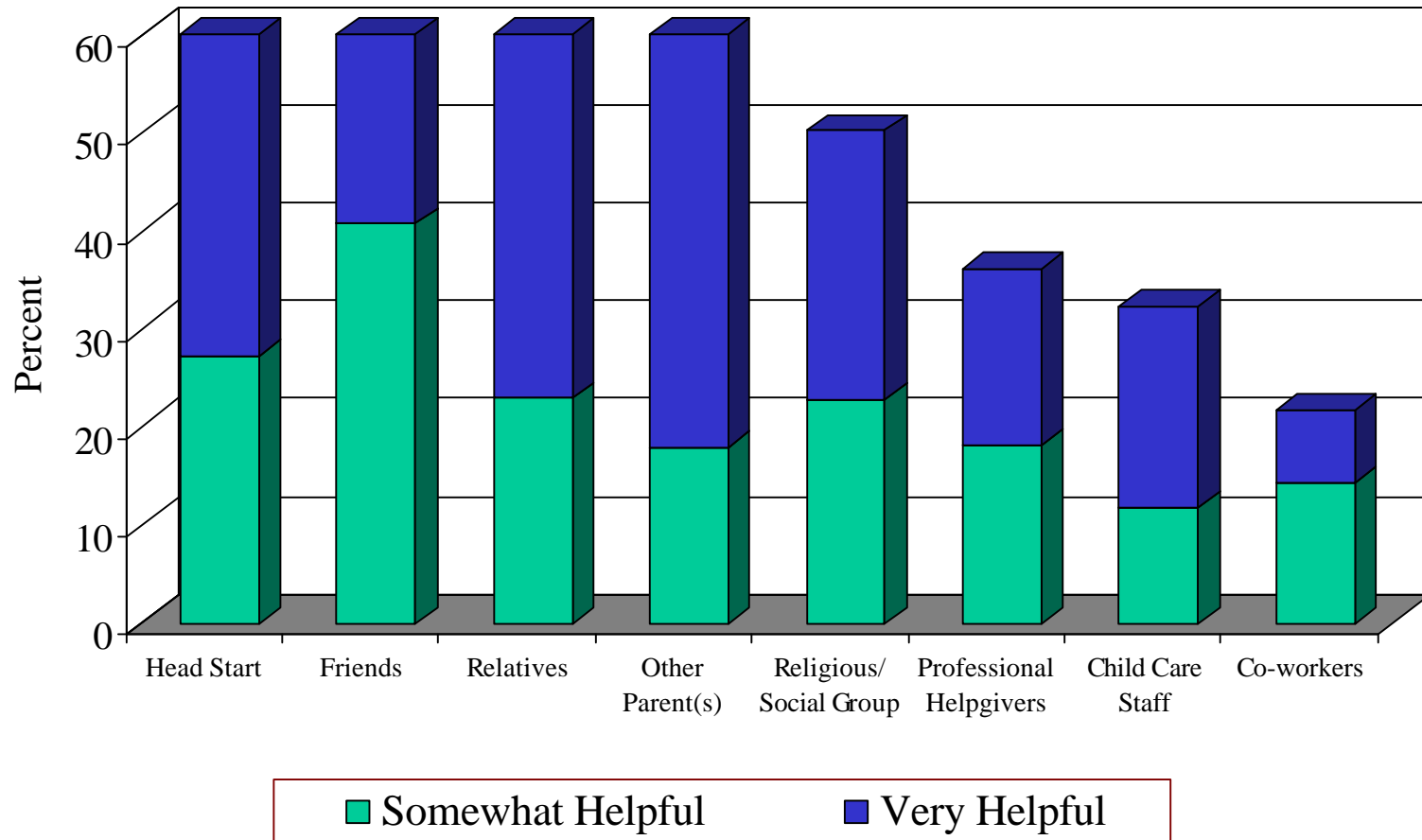
## Primary Caregivers Were Very Satisfied with the Head Start Program



# Most Primary Caregivers Were Very Active Within Head Start



# In Spring '98, Primary Caregivers Reported That Head Start Was Important As a Source of Support for Raising Their Child



## Summary

In addressing Head Start's need for information on children and their families, in depth data have been collected in a number of areas from a large, nationally representative sample of enrolled families. Project reports and papers will contain more detailed descriptions of these families.

Descriptive findings on these families are very valuable for local Head Start programs and the Head Start Bureau in determining the distribution of program resources. For example, understanding the challenges families face will help Head Start staff, particularly teachers and family advocates, know where to target resources, to be better trained to help needy families get required services, help families move towards self-sufficiency, and strengthen parents' behavior in their role as primary nurturers of their children.

Subsequent data collections and analyses will focus on the changes that families present over time. Family change may be due to societal factors (e.g. welfare reform), typical family maturation (e.g., experience), or more extraordinary family circumstances (e.g., divorce, a parent completing school or a training program). It is also possible that family or individual change is due to the efforts of Head Start. It will be our challenge to find where change can be attributed to the efforts of Head Start staff to serve these families.